

Soul Benefit brings R&B, Motown and spirit of giving to Concerts in the Park

It is hard to practice social distancing when rehearsing with your band, but if there is a will, there's also a way ? provided you have enough space.

Fortunately, for Soul Benefit's Steve Falk, there was plenty of room to go around in the parking lot of his Industrial Parkway North-based business Prime Data.

Since the easing of restrictions allowed them to get together once again, the sounds of Soul Benefit, a popular local band which pools their talents to help local charities and non-profits raise funds for a variety of worthy causes, have rung out from the asphalt, with the occasional coyote or feral cat sauntering down nearby railway tracks their only audience.

That audience is set to get a whole lot larger next Wednesday, August 26, when Soul Benefit takes over the bandshell of Town Park as part of the Town of Aurora's popular Concerts in the Park summer series.

?Everyone in the band is excited to play in front of people again,? says Mr. Falk. ?From the standpoint of musicians who love to get together, play music, and the social experience of it, it was really hard to be locked down like everyone else, but musicians often had these gigs to look forward to as social animals; they would have a couple of nights a week where they would meet with their fellow musicians and play. Suddenly, that just came to an end and you're at home. Even just playing at home was limiting. People just got cut off.?

Like so many musicians, Soul Benefit found an outlet through new channels, keeping in practice ? and staying social with each other ? through Zoom and other platforms.

?Our band has 14 members who all looked forward to Thursday night as our rehearsals, as they had been for 22 years,? says Mr. Falk. ?We just started doing it on Zoom and although it wasn't musical, it was a chance to remember that we're all there and we're all looking forward to getting back together again. That carried us through for many weeks and then, suddenly, they said we could meet with 10 people.?

Out came the extension cords, which were strung across the Prime Data parking lot, and musicians claimed the 10 available rehearsal spots.

Soul Benefit is cognizant of how the lockdown and quarantine impacted the arts and culture sector. It is not a community that has a traditional ?safety net,? says Mr. Falk, and so many people who rely on regular gigs were impacted. For a group that supports non-profits, and not being able to play for them at events that were necessarily shut down, they have seen struggles beyond the music industry.

?We can't wait to be back supporting local organizations the way we have for 20 years, playing music and supporting them at their events, but here is a first step,? says Mr. Falk of next week's Concerts in the Park event, noting they are putting together a program of everything from Aretha Franklin to Amy Winehouse.

?We want to make people feel awesome,? he says, conceding that building a program for a concert where people are required to stay in their social bubbles, refrain from getting up and dancing, and are even discouraged from singing along, has been a bit of a challenge. ?We couldn't do an hour and a half of keeping it down ? we're not a zen meditation band!

?This is a tough time and music is good for the soul and we want to be able to produce some of that.?

For more on Aurora's Concerts in the Park lineup, including how to register for the 100 spots available in Town Park, visit aurora.ca/concertsinthepark. Showtime is 7 ? 8.30 p.m. and online registration is free. Concerts are also streamed live on YouTube

and through the Town's social media channels.

By Brock Weir